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Title	Contextualizing Indian Myths : Post-colonial Identity Formation in the Selected Post-Independence Novels of R. K. Narayan
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Citation	言語文化共同研究プロジェクト. 2018 p.5-p.14
Issue Date	2019-05-31
oaire:version	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/72728
rights	
Note	

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Contextualizing Indian Myths:

Post-colonial Identity Formation in the Selected Post-Independence Novels of R. K. Narayan

Md. Mamunur Rahman

1. Introduction

R. K. Narayan (1906-2001) is considered as one of the founding fathers of Indian fiction in English. In common with many of his contemporary Indian writers in English, Narayan hailed from a middle-class background; the social position of his father rested on his being educated in the colonial tradition and getting a job under the colonial administration. Narayan chose to write in English simply because he got excellent command in the language through his education. He said in an interview, "My whole education has been in English from the primary school, and most of my reading has been in the English language . . . I wrote in English because it came to me very easily."[1] Narayan seems to have appropriated the language to describe the Indian reality with which he was deeply imbued. Iyeneger comments that "He is of India, even of South India: he uses the English language much as we used to wear dhoties manufactured in Lancashire – but the thoughts and feelings, the stirrings of the soul, the wayward movements of the consciousness, are all of the soil of India."[2] Beginning in the 1930s, when Mahatma Gandhi's anti-colonial movement got momentum, Narayan's writing career continued for around seven decades and, as such it witnessed the major events in the colonial and post-colonial periods of India, including India's independence in 1947 and various social and political problems that accompanied it.

Apparently Narayan remains detached from the major political affairs of his time, yet his writings represent the social and cultural transformation of India brought about by the long period of colonial rule. He mostly deals with the middle class that owed its birth to the British colonial enterprise in India and continued to be a potent force in the socio-political development in colonial and post-colonial India. The people of this class had their roots in their traditional families, yet they were in considerable touch with modernity, thanks to their education, business and profession. Thus, the social upheaval created by the encounter between tradition and modernity is a pervasive feature in Narayan's writings.

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[1] Quoted in P. S. Sundaram, *R. K. Narayan as a Novelist* (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corp., 1988) p. 8.
[2] K. R. Srinivasa Iyeneger (1985), *Indian Writing in English*. 5th ed. (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 2000) p. 359.

Walsh writes: "The acceptance of life, which his art expresses, has no doubt a root in the national condition."[3]

Narayan produced some of his best novels in the post-independence period of India, in which he depicts the post-colonial situations and analyzes the responsibilities of the Indian people in the new nation-state. Jyotsna K. Singh contends that the writings of R. K. Narayan, Anita Desai and Vikram Seth and a handful of other Indian novelists in English seem to have supported the idea of the nation as an "imagined community", because they tend to express "the shared experiences of all Indians, however removed by geographical and cultural differences".[4] In case of Narayan, his fictional town Malgudi becomes the site of India's arrival into modernity penetrating nearly every aspect of Indian society while allowing its traditional frame visible. Narayan's post-independence novels reveal a complex negotiation between the colonial legacies and the independent present, leading to the hybrid formation of the Indian identity. The novelist seems to use traditional Indian myths in the modern context to explain this post-colonial hybridity. This paper analyses three post-independence novels of R. K. Narayan, *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Guide* (1958) and *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961), to illustrate how the novelist contextualizes Indian myths to explain his stance on India's post-colonial identity formation.

2. The function of myth in Narayan's post-independence novels

In his post-independence novels, Narayan relies increasingly on traditional myths, drawing on themes like renunciation, incarnation, re-birth, *ahimsa* or non-violence, and the law of *karma* or fate to explain the modern situation of India. As Boehmer indicates, such literary activity of adapting and using indigenous myth in the modern context is a decolonizing strategy which postcolonial writers employ to assert an independent identity within the new national formation. Boehmer explains:

> In a nationalist climate, the belief embedded in indigenous myth, too, recaptured attention. Writers came to recognize that the gods, demons, half-children, warriors, and strange beasts in local legend and oral epic still held explanatory power, despite the efforts of missions and schools to eradicate them. Figures from myth could not simply be dismissed as outworn fetishes or heathen embarrassments. They offered a rich resource for cultures seeking redefinitions of self.[5]

Postcolonial writers posit mythical gods and characters in the context of the modern westernised reality and, by this act of hybridity, attempt to interpret the complex process of identity formation in a 'post-colonial' nation.

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[3] William Walsh, *Indian Writings in English* (London and New York: Longman, 1990) p. 78.
[4] Jyotsna K. Singh, *Colonial Narrative, Cultural Dialogue* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) p. 162.
[5] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford & New York: OUP, 1995) p. 202.

Narayan was considerably knowledgeable about Hindu myths and scriptures. In his childhood, he used to hear mythical stories from his grandmother.[6] Later, he retold and published two Hindu epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, and mythological stories from the *Puranas*.[7] In the introduction to his Tamil translation of the Sanskrit epic *The Ramayana*, Narayan writes, "It may sound hyperbolic, but I am prepared to state that almost every individual among five hundred millions living in India is aware of the story of *The Ramayana* in some measure or other."[8] With such an awareness of the pervasive role of myths in contemporary Indian society, Narayan tends to believe that myths and legends have their relevance to modern life – the characters of the Indian mythology can be seen as "types and symbols, possessing psychological validity even when seen against the contemporary background."[9] In other words, Narayan draws on traditional myths with a view to interpreting India's post-colonial reality.

However, Narayan's use of myths is not an attempt to recreate India's pre-colonial past. In fact, Narayan did not believe that things had been better in the pre-colonial period – according to his friend N. Ram, Narayan would always say, "Things were not better but were worse, poorer and backward in the past", and then he would recollect the plague, the starvation, deaths etc. He never liked to romanticize the past.[10] As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin argue, because the reality in a post-colonial society is 'syncretic', it is problematic to see Narayan as "deeply traditional": "The post-colonial text is always a complex and hybridized formation. It is inadequate to read it either as a reconstruction of pure traditional values or as simply foreign or intrusive. The construction of 'pure' cultural value is always conducted within a radically altered power relation."[11]

3. A new confidence at the departure of the Raj

Narayan's first novel after independence, *Mr. Sampath* (1949) portrays Indian society in the last days of the Raj. As is typical of Narayan, the novel is set in the small town of Malgudi. By linking the town to a mythical period in Indian history, Narayan foregrounds the authentic Indian identity against which he weighs British colonialism to reach to the understanding that British presence in India is rather an insignificant and fleeting event.

The protagonist of *Mr. Samapth*, Srinivas feels the metaphysical problem of existence, as he

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[6] See R. K. Narayan (1974), *My Days: A Memoir* (Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 1995) p. 11.
[7] '*Puranas*' literally means something of the ancient period. It refers to Sanskrit sacred writings on Hindu mythology and folklore, dating back to as old as the 4th century AD.
[8] R. K. Narayan, *The Indian Epics Retold* (New Delhi: The Penguin India Ltd, 1995) p. 6. Narayan's comment on the Indian admiration of the epic has also been proven by the trail-blazing popularity of the TV serial on *Ramayana* in the 1980s. See https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-15363181.
[9] See R. K. Narayan, "English in India" in *The Writerly Life: Selected Non-fiction of R. K. Narayan*, ed. S. Krishnan (New Delhi: Viking, 2001) p. 466.
[10] N. Ram, "I am Giving You a Lot of Trouble." http://www.rediff.com/news/2001/May/15spec.htm. Access: 23 Apr, 2019.
[11] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, ed. Terence Hawkes (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) p. 110.

ponders: "Who am I? This is a far more serious problem than any I have known before. It is a big problem and I have to face it."[12] Srinivas identifies his problem with that of his community, and this is why he declares that his edited journal *The Banner* has nothing to do with the impending Second World War; rather it is concerned with the inner conflicts and contradictions within a man. Srinivas wishes to change not only the evil of colonialism but also the evil that eats up Indian society from within. Thus *The Banner* works towards promoting social welfare and reform, publishing special articles to fight off social injustice and oppression. Srinivas does not want to abide by his family tradition with its middle-class obsession with money; rather he intends to live by the spiritual teaching of *Upanishad* that prescribes, first of all, knowing the self.[13] As against this great teaching, the question of prestige to be achieved through colonial education appears ridiculous to him. Srinivas' spiritual quest turns him to be an ardent devotee of the god Nataraja.[14] In this way, Srinivas sets out to find his identity in the Indian tradition.

Yet, Srinivas' search for an identity is not a smooth journey, as he is dragged into the hubbub of the world around him, which itself leans towards westernization. The character of Srinivas is set against a group of characters pursuing material gain and modern lifestyle – his printer Sampath and the Hollywood film expert De Mello belong to this category. Srinivas is assigned by Mr. Sampath to write story for film. He at first decides to write about the past and present of the country, including a story about Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence but finally proposes to draw the subject matter from Indian mythology: 'the burning of Kama', featuring the story of Shiva and his love with Parvathi and enmity with Kama, the God of Love. However, Sampath and De Mello change the myth to such an effect that it totally distorts the original story. For Srinivas, this shock is coupled with the colonial behaviour of Mr. Edward Shilling, the local head of the Engladia Insurance Company, who unjustly sacks Ravi and will not re-employ him even after Srinivas' repeated entreaty. Srinivas reacts angrily, saying :

> This is not the India of East India Company Days, remember, when you were looked upon as a shahib, when probably your grand-uncle had an escort of five elephants whenever he stirred out. Nowadays you have to give and take at ordinary human levels, do you understand? Forget for ever that God created Indians in order to provide clerks for the East India Company or their successors.[15]

Through Srinivas' diatribe against colonialism, Narayan is able to provide the reader with a glimpse

[12] R. K. Narayan (1949), *Mr. Sampath* in *The World of Malgudi*, ed. S. Krishnan (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000) p. 9.
[13] The *Upanishads* are ancient Sanskrit sacred texts that contain some of the central philosophical concepts and ideas of Hinduism, written between 800-200BC.
[14] Nataraja is the Hindu god Shiva in his image as the cosmic dancer. Shiva is the destroyer of evil and regenerator of the universe. His wife Parvati is the goddess of fertility.
[15] *Mr. Sampath*. P.83.

of the general Indian sentiment on the eve of independence.

With all these experiences disturbing him, Srinivas undergoes a vision in which he can see mythical figures like Sri Rama, Laxman and Hanumans, the Buddha and the great Sankara, and then he also visualizes the Christian missionaries and the British merchants and soldiers.[16] This vision helps Srinivas hit on a conclusion that Indian history is a dynamic one in which colonial rule cannot continue for a prolonged period of time: "Dynasties rose and fell. Palaces and mansions appeared and disappeared. The entire country went down under the fire and sword of the invader, and was washed clean when Sarayu overflowed its bounds. But it always had its rebirth and growth."[17]

However, as Naipaul maintains, judged from the context of nation-building in a post-colonial nation-state, Narayan's narrative does not seem to endorse Srinivas' attitude towards Indian civilization. Srinivas' vision of the permanence of India puts little responsibility on individuals, and this passive conviction is somewhat opposed to Gandhi's teaching. Naipaul explains:

> Just twenty years have passed between Gandhi's first call for civil disobedience and the events of the novel. But already, in Srinivas, Gandhian non-violence has degenerated into something very like the opposite of what Gandhi intended. For Srinivas non-violence isn't a form of action, a quickener of social conscience. It is not only a means of securing an undisturbed calm; it is nondoing, noninterference, social indifference.[18]

For Naipaul, Srinivas' notion has its root in the Hindu conception of existence, where self-identity becomes an aspect of *karma* or fate. Narayan seems to favour activism and, this is why, he indicates that although Srinivas' passivity is in conformity with religion, it entails a breach of the basic Gandhian principles. It is worth noting here that the inability of the Indian people to grasp Gandhi's ideal is a theme that Narayan elaborates in his novel *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955).

4. Indian society at the crossroad

The issue of nation-building and the complex process involved in the modernization of the Indian society feature prominently in *The Guide* (1958), a novel considered as Narayan's *magnum opus*. In this novel, the tension inherent in the transition of the colonized society is exemplified in the central character, Raju. He is born in a society which, although strongly bent on tradition, shows the sign of a gradual change towards modernity with the advent of railways, high-rise hotels, tourist spots, Photo Bureau, Albert Mission School and so many other modern icons. Krishna Sen argues that the railway is the main signifier of the colonial culture, signifying a new social economy, and Raju's identification

[16] Sri Rama is the major deity in Hinduism, Laxman is his younger brother, Shankara can refer to Shiva whom the Hindus, especially the Shaivites worship as the supreme God.
[17] *Mr. Sampath*. P. 163. Sarayu is the river with mythical origin, passing by the town of Malgudi.
[18] V. S. Naipaul (1979), *India : A Wounded Civilization* (London: Picador, 2001) p. 15.

with the railway – the railway Raju – marks him out as a postcolonial man.[19] Attracted by the glamour of the modern way of living, Raju violates the time-honoured social and ethical codes. His ambitions induce him to abandon his father's humble shop, the railway stall and his vocation as a guide. Raju's whole life is the manifestation of a series of unscrupulous acts – indulging in extra-marital love with Rosie, driving his mother out of his house, forging Rosie's signature and playing on the beliefs of the innocent villagers. Raju's individual aspiration as opposed to the family or social obligation is a manifestation of the intrusion of colonial ideology in the traditional fabric of the society. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write, one of the strongest trace marks of westernisation on the post-colonial world is the conflict between "a traditional insistence on the collective, family, group, and society, and the opposed demands of the European ideology of the independent 'individual'."[20]

Although Raju's career exemplifies the impact of colonial modernity on Indian society, he is finally drawn into the fold of tradition. After his release from jail, he wants to live as a fake *sanyasi* or ascetic by exploiting the belief of the innocent villagers. Joyant K. Biswal writes: "In such a mysterious land where people readily believe that yogis can fly to the Himalayas just by a thought, it is no wonder for a sinner to be mistaken for a saint."[21] The transformation of Raju from a sinner into a saint is made possible by the very social tradition of India that possesses man like Velan who, even after hearing the entire story of Raju's ignoble past, accepts him as a *swami* or religious leader. Since then, Raju cannot ignore the expectation of the villagers wishing him to keep fast to bring about the much-desired rain. At last, he comes to a firm resolution that he must play the role of a saint: "For the first time in his life he was making an earnest effort, for the first time he was learning the thrill of full application outside money and love; for the first time he was doing a thing in which he was not personally interested."[22] This resolution transforms his status from a fake *sanyasi* to a genuine one who is willing to sacrifice his life for the good of his fellow human beings. In his capacity to renounce the world, Raju is thought to be the reincarnation of Devaka who, in Indian mythology, was a hero and a saint. Viney Kirpal suggests that Raju's spiritual evolution can best be understood if the novel is read within the framework of Hindu metaphysical tradition, which will reveal that his progress "enacts the archetypal journey of every Hindu towards salvation as described in the *Dharma Sastra* (the Sacred Law)."[23]

The course in Raju's life is a proof that "behind the apparent tremors caused by the western influence, there is an unconscious commitment to the ancient Indian values".[24] Yet, as Narayan

[19] Krishna Sen, *Critical Essays on R. K. Narayan's The Guide* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2004) p. 112.
[20] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. 1994. p. 114.
[21] Jayant K. Biswal, *A Critical Study of the Novels of R.K. Narayan: The Malgudi Comedy* (New Delhi: Nirmal Publishers and Distributors, 1987) p. 23.
[22] R. K. Narayan, *The Guide*, 1958 (Rpt. Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 1971) p. 213.
[23] See Viney Kirpal, "Moksha for Raju: The Archetypal Four Stage Journey" in *World Literature in English,* Vol. 28.2 (1988) pp. 356-63.
[24] Jayant K. Biswal, 1987, p. 23.

shows, this 'western influence' has been an integral part of the Indian reality. Thus, centring on the site where Raju keeps fast, various 'modern' organizations, including the foreign media, the Tea Propaganda Board, the Health Department and the American film producers set up their operations. Here Narayan seems to hint that colonial influence has made a rather hybrid reality where cultural purity or authenticity has always been eluding. The idea is further strengthened by the novel's ambiguous ending where Raju tells Velan that he can feel it is raining in the hill. Narayan does not make it clear whether it is an actual rainfall or just a mistaken vision of Raju in his hunger and extreme weakness. In this way, Narayan employs Hindu beliefs and myths ambiguously to suggest a rather complex process involved in the hybridized formation of society in post-independence India.[25]

The Guide, like Narayan's *The Dark Room* (1938) and *The Painter of Signs* (1976), relates the issue of India's post-colonial formation to the idea of the equality of women. Indian social tradition was absolutely in favour of men; female subordination was sanctioned by the ancient sacred books.[26] However, modern education and western influence were gradually intervening in this status quo and a new reality about the question of gender equality was dawning upon Indian women who had to face an inevitable dilemma – either to remain subordinate to men as prescribed by Indian tradition or to rebel against that tradition to be free from the patriarchal control. Against this backdrop, *The Guide*, dealing with husband-wife relation in the context of Indian social reality, presents a critique of the position of women in the heavily patriarchal Indian society. In this novel, Rosie belongs to the 'subaltern' class by the double standards of caste and gender – she is from the neglected caste of the temple dancers. Nevertheless, she manages to get modern education, becoming an MA in Economics and marrying the archaeologist Marco. Moreover, she is not ready to fulfil her husband's expectation of being a submissive wife. She breaks the social code by 'living together' with Raju, performing dance in public and showing considerable independent spirit. Although Narayan finally makes her prone to submit herself to her legal husband Marco, her career shows the cracks in the traditional idea of women. Her character represents Narayan's ambivalence about the position of women in independent India. He portrays Rosie as 'other' to the traditional concept of women, who lures Raju like a seductress and whose dance is compared to the mythical snake dance. In his later novel, *The Painter of Signs*, Narayan seems to move away from this ambivalence, portraying more resolute and assertive female character.

5. The pragmatism of modern India

The Man-Eater of Malgudi (1961) was written when Narayan was "at the pitch of his

[25] See Alam, 2002, p. 47.

[26] See Michel Pousse, "Women in the Early Novels of R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand." in *Critical Studies on Indian Fiction in English*, ed. A Singh and VLVN Narendra Kumar (New Delhi: Atlantic Publisher and Distributors, 1999) 35-46.

powers".[27] In this novel too, Narayan uses Indian myths in the modern context to suggest the post-colonial responsibility of the Indian people. The protagonist Nataraj represents the traditional aspect of Indian society which, however, has already been touched by modernity. He has a nuclear family; while his wife retains the time honoured traditions in her home, Nataraj himself runs a printing press, a modern means of living, and his son goes to Albert Mission School, a colonial icon. Nataraj is grateful to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth for his modest income and hangs her picture on the wall of the front room of his press. The front room works as a gathering place for his friends who talks of the state affairs, of Nehru the Prime minister and the current problems of the nation. However, the calm and quiet life of Nataraj is suddenly disturbed by the arrival of Vasu, the over-imposing taxidermist who occupies the attic of Nataraj's office building. Vasu comes as an intruder who despises and attacks all the traditional assumptions and values by which Nataraj and his friends live. While the lifestyle of Nataraj and his friends is sanctioned by traditions, Vasu is "maddened by any whiff of what is established or unquestioned".[28] Vasu is a reckless taxidermist who does not even hesitate to kill an eagle held as sacred in Indian mythology.

In *The Man-Eater of* Malgudi, Narayan consciously uses the Bhasmasura myth to build up a demonic association with Vasu. Narayan comments:

> At some point in one's writing career, one takes a fresh look at the so-called myths and legends and find a new meaning in them. After writing a number of novels and short stories based on the society around me, some years ago, suddenly I came across a theme which struck me as an excellent piece of mythology in modern dress. It was published under the title *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*. I based this story on a well-known mythological episode, the story of Mohini and Bhasmasura.[29]

The resemblance between Vasu and the mythical demon explains why the conflict between Nataraj and Vasu embodies the conflict between tradition and modernity, involving many other issues, such as the clash between good and evil. Iyengar indicates that *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* might have been a modern version of Deva-Asura conflicts.[30] Although it is difficult to identify the timid Nataraj with Deva, the divine and the excellent, Vasu in many respects resembles *Asura*, the disturbing demon.

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[27] See William Walsh, 1990. p. 79.
[28] William Walsh, 1990. p. 82.
[29] M. K. Bhatnagar, ed., *New Insights into the Novels of R. K. Narayan*. (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2002) p. 25. Bhasmasura was a demon who misused his divine boon of turning anybody into ashes with the touch of his hands. Finally, he was induced by the enchantress Mohini to turn himself into ashes by touching his head with his own hands.
[30] K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, 2000. p. 382. In Indian mythology, the conflict between Devas and Asuras symbolizes the perennial conflict between good and evil.

One of the underlying themes of *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* is *ahimsa* or non-violence.[31] The response of Nataraj and his associates to Vasu's anti-social activities is quite passive and non-violent, following the doctrine of Mahatma Gandhi. Narayan's juxtaposition of the two opposite characters representing the opposite principles of violence and *ahimsa* helps him present the nature of Indian people, their long-held religion and their strong root in the established tradition. Nataraj is accustomed to leading the type of life endorsed by his tradition. Vasu, on the other hand, is aggressive and against the principle of non-violence. At the end of the novel, Vasu destroys himself while attempting to kill a mosquito on his temple. The manner of his death echoes that of the termination of the demons in various myths. Vasu's downfall exemplifies the defeat of evil and the triumph of truth. Narayan writes in *Gods, Demons and Others*:

> The characters in the epics are prototypes and moulds in which humanity is cast, and remain valid for all time. Every story has implicit in it a philosophical or moral significance, and underlining of the distinction between good and evil.
> The suffering of the meek and the saintly are temporary, even as the triumph of the demon is, every one knows this. Everything is bound to come out right in the end; if not immediately, at least in a thousand or ten thousand years, if not in this world, at least in other worlds.[32]

Thus Narayan expresses his belief that ancient myths and legends are still applicable to modern life in a symbolic way. It is this line of thought that relates the novel, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* to the broader issues of nation-building. As Fakrul Alam maintains, Narayan "inserts into this ostensibly non-political plot a number of references to issues about nation-building which stamp the novel as one exploiting an issue central to postcoloniality: should the newly independent nation reject the western model of development?"[33] Referring to Molly Mahood who claims, "Vasu represents the modernizing, westernizing option available to India which would transform Indian life at the expense of rhythms of traditional Indian society", Alam opines that Narayan does not totally refuse the principles embodied by Vasu.[34] Vasu is destructive, reckless and anti-social but, Alam continues, he is also revealed as a patriot who, as an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi, took part in civil disobedience movement to oust the British. Again, in some respects he is admirable too – he is pro-active and practical-minded, in contrast to Nataraj's friends who are passive and inefficient. Rama Kundu also argues that the characterization of Vasu involves a positive ambivalence on the part of the author – although by his appearance, behaviour, attitude and lifestyle Vasu may be likened

[31] See Mustafizur Rahman, *The Elusive Searchlight: The Novels of R. K. Narayan* (Dhaka: Parama, 1998) p. 122.
[32] R. K. Narayan, *Gods, Demons and Others* (Mysore: Indian Thoughts Publications, 1968) pp. 4-5.
[33] Fakrul Alam, 2002, pp. 50-51.
[34] See Fakrul Alam, 2002, pp. 50-52.

to a demon, he has a characteristic charm. As Rama Kundu mentions, Indian demonology "often envisions demons as beings of extraordinary gifts, skills, prowess, even beauty" and in Indian imagination, demons "are rarely villains; on the contrary they often appears fascinating, even admirable, though rather terrifying with their excesses."[35]

Noticeably, Nataraj is simultaneously disgusted and fascinated by Vasu's appearance and activities. Towards the end of the novel, some of Vasu's dynamism has been infused into Nataraj who makes attempts to neutralize Vasu's capacity to harm. When Nataraj becomes familiar with Vasu's plan to kill the temple elephant, he initially wants to negotiate with Vasu, in the manner of Gandhi's non-violence. Afterwards, he climbs up the stairs of Vasu's attic even at the risk of his life. So, as Fakrul Alam contends, Narayan does not suggest the utter rejection of the western influence, rather he seems to indicate that Indian people should shake off their passivity and embrace some of the positive influences of the West without loosing ties with their traditions.[36]

The Man-Eater of Malgudi puts forth the idea that Indian tradition and culture, beginning its journey from time immemorial, is sure to continue despite all occupation and control by the alien forces like the British – the theme already dealt with in *Mr. Sampath*. As Sastri, Nataraj's religious-minded assistant, explains, "the universe has survived all the *rakshasas* that were ever born. Every demon carries within him, unknown to himself, a tiny seed of self-destruction, and goes up in thin air at the most unexpected moment. Otherwise what is to happen to humanity?"[37] In this way, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* relates the very idea of the continuity and indestructibility of Indian tradition to Indian cosmology.

6. Conclusion

R. K. Narayan's three novels, *Mr. Sampath*, *The Guide* and *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* were published within one and a half decades of Indian independence. Discussion of these novels provides an understanding that Narayan's consciousness as a writer has been informed by the immense weight of the inherited tradition of India in balance with the influence of colonialism. Narayan's creative use of myth to interpret modern reality seems to be a postcolonial gesture aimed at a synthesis of Indian tradition and its modern West-affected reality leading to the hybrid social formation. Narayan interrogates the colonial legacy, and at the same time, suggests accepting some aspects of that legacy in the construction of post-independence Indian nationhood.

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[35] Rama Kundu, "R. K. Narayan: A Return to Ritual and Folklore." in M. K. Bhatnagar, ed. 2002. p. 36.
[36] See Fakrul Alam, 2002, p. 52.
[37] R. K. Narayan, *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*, 1961 (Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 2000) p. 183. A *rakshasa* is a malignant demon.